

This Land is My Land and Yours Too!

by Joe Cannella

You can not get more American than public land. It dates back to our forefathers that made sure all fish and game belong to the public, even on private land, along with providing land and waters for their pursuit. I remember reading about oyster beds that were set aside for public harvest even before we became a nation. We do not have the King's land or the King's deer, it is our land, for the public to enjoy. It is not government land that some politicians rename it and would like to paint it as something wasteful and should be privatized for the good of the country. In my opinion public land is tax money well spent. We all can make a list of worst projects that receive tax dollars. And frankly without public land America is just not America!

I didn't always live in an area that allows me vast acreage to hunt and public water access within minutes of my residence in Itasca County. It was small public lands managed by the state of Illinois which allowed me the chance to become a hunter. My first pheasant hunts took place at the Chain of Lakes state park north of Chicago for released birds in assigned fields and planted sunflowers set up for dove hunting at designated shooting stations. This kind of organized hunting does not light my fire today but it sure sparked my interest and has lead me to cherish public lands.

Growing up in and near a metropolis and loving the outdoor life I was met with many challenges to fulfill my desires. Lets just say I have experienced many doors slammed in my face preempted by "we do not allow such barbaric activities on our land!" Or the time when I had permission to trap a creek along a highway but the deputy sheriff confronted me as I walked to my Mom's station wagon with my .22 rifle and a couple of raccoons in a burlap sack. He insisted trapping was not allowed. I told him, as politely as an annoyed 16 year could, that he should call the game warden if he didn't believe me. I'm not sure he even knew what a game warden was but he did eventually get a hold of someone that informed him I was doing nothing illegal. As he departed he let me know his personal disgust with me trapping in this " bedroom community". By the way there are no woods around that creek today, just houses and a shopping mall. Probably not much in regards to wildlife either.

Today most of my hunting companions where I live have probably never had to ask permission to hunt and finding a place to launch a boat has never been an issue. But let me tell you if it gets taken away they will be singing that song " you don't know what you got till it's gone!

Having a place for the common American to hunt, fish, hike, pick berries or enjoy forest trails is one of our greatest freedoms. In fact, I think access, especially to lands within a short drive to metro areas is the most important limiting factor to hunter recruitment. Why metro areas? Well, that is where the people are and if getting out to chase a few birds or wet line is an all day journey the time spent will be very limited, hence less likely. And when it comes to kids quick trips are crucial to those early experiences. So nature centers, large county parks, state parks

and other potential lands should all be considered for limited hunting access in some shape or form. And southern Minnesota, keep acquiring those public lands, they are worth it for the freedom they provide and by the way, they do not need formal management plans, they just need to be wild!

So Minnesota sportsmen and women, keep a watchful eye on any politician that downplays the importance of public land. And if he or she calls it government land get your radar up. They do not have your best interest in mind.